

seizing markets that could and should belong to U.S. agriculture.

Madam Speaker, we are living in a global economy. If we are truly committed to economic recovery in the United States, now is the time to promote U.S. products abroad.

□ 1210

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, the Chair will postpone further proceedings today on motions to suspend the rules on which a recorded vote or the yeas and nays are ordered, or on which the vote incurs objection under clause 6 of rule XX.

Record votes on postponed questions will be taken later.

EXPANDING ACCESS TO STATE VETERANS HOMES FOR GOLD STAR PARENTS

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 4505) to enable State homes to furnish nursing home care to parents any of whose children died while serving in the Armed Forces.

The Clerk read the title of the bill.

The text of the bill is as follows:

H.R. 4505

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. EXPANSION OF STATE HOME CARE FOR PARENTS OF VETERANS WHO DIED WHILE SERVING IN ARMED FORCES.

In administering section 51.210(d) of title 38, Code of Federal Regulations, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall permit a State home to provide services to, in addition to non-veterans described in such subsection, a non-veteran any of whose children died while serving in the Armed Forces.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) and the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BUYER) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.R. 4505.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

I rise in support of this bill, legislation to support the families of fallen service men and women. The bill offers access to State veteran homes to parents who have lost a child serving in the Armed Forces. While this service is currently available to some parents, we must recognize that any parent who has lost even one child should be given our support and care.

Madam Speaker, it is easy to understand the profound sacrifices that members of the armed services make daily in the service of their country. However, sometimes we forget that their fathers, mothers, husbands, wives and children also sacrifice deeply. When we memorialize the service of a dead servicemember, we must not forget the pain and sacrifice that their family has also endured.

Madam Speaker, this bill represents an important step forward in honoring the sacrifices of not just our servicemembers, but their families as well. I urge the support of my colleagues.

I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

(Mr. BUYER asked and was given permission to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BUYER. Today, I rise in support of H.R. 4505 to enable State homes to furnish nursing home care to parents any of whose children died while serving in the Armed Forces.

This legislation was introduced by my good friend and colleague from Texas, MAC THORNBERRY.

The loss of a child is a heartbreaking tragedy for any parent. When that loss occurs in defense of American freedom and democracy, we as a grateful and compassionate nation, must do all that we can to ease their pain and provide for their needs.

The State Veterans Home program is a partnership between the VA and the States to provide a broad range of long-term nursing home care for our veterans in need of such care.

Although admission to a State Home is determined by each individual state, each Home is required to maintain a residency of at least seventy-five percent veterans. Non-veterans may be admitted to a State Home if they meet certain criteria. Under current law, eligible non-veterans are veteran's spouses, widows, and Gold Star parents who have lost all of their children in military service.

H.R. 4505 would allow Gold Star parents who have lost a child but not necessarily all of their children to service in the Armed Forces eligibility for admission to a State Home. This is a simple change, and simply the right thing to do.

I want to thank MAC for recognizing this gap and taking the initiative to introduce legislation to correct the oversight and improve services for a parent who suffered the loss of a child in service to our country.

It is important to note that this bill would not result in any additional cost to the VA. And, most importantly, would not in any way impact the space available to veterans in State Veterans Homes.

Our highest admiration and respect should always lie with our servicemembers and veterans who knowingly and willingly put their lives on the line to protect our freedoms. And, we must also acknowledge and honor their beloved family members who also sacrifice in service to our country.

H.R. 4505 is supported by the Gold Star Wives of America, other major Veterans Service Organizations, and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

I urge each and every one of my colleagues to join me in supporting H.R. 4505.

Madam Speaker, I yield such time as he may consume to the author of the bill, MAC THORNBERRY of Texas.

Mr. THORNBERRY. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Indiana, who has been a very strong advocate for veterans and a respected voice in national security during the time that he has been in Congress. We will surely miss him in another year when he is no longer in our midst.

Madam Speaker, this is one of those issues that leaves people scratching their heads and saying, well, that doesn't make sense, because the way it works now is to be eligible for a State veterans home, a Gold Star parent must have lost all of their children. This bill will allow a parent to be eligible for a State veterans home if they have lost a child while serving in the military.

Now, there are 137 State veterans homes in all 50 States. Those States will still be able to determine the priority level about admissions. They still have to have 75 percent of their beds occupied by veterans. But the average occupancy rate now across the country is 86 percent. There is roughly 15 percent of empty beds in these homes, so this bill basically allows an added group of Gold Star parents who have lost a child while serving in the military to be eligible to fill those beds.

Essentially, there is no cost. The Department of Veterans Affairs has come back and said it will not cost the Federal Government anything. Our visits with the States have gotten the same result. It is supported by the American Legion, the VFW, and the Veterans Department.

Madam Speaker, I would say it has a practical benefit in that it gives an additional option for parents who have lost a child serving in the military, but in a larger sense, it gives a message of gratitude and support for the sacrifice that those parents have made.

I want to thank the chair and certainly the ranking member for bringing this to the floor. I want to express my appreciation to Dr. VIC SNYDER, the gentleman from Arkansas, who was an original sponsor of this bill with me, as well as Senator ENSIGN, who brought this matter to my attention last year. He tried to resolve it last year and was not able to do so, but hopefully it can be solved this year. I thank the gentleman again for yielding.

Mr. BUYER. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the gentleman for bringing this, and I also thank the gentleman for his leadership on the House Armed Services Committee. You are filling a gap here. This is supported by the Gold Star wives, along with other major veterans service organizations.

I urge all my colleagues to join me in support of H.R. 4505.

I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. FILNER. Madam Speaker, I urge all my colleagues to support H.R. 4505, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by